

United States House of Representatives
Committee on Government Reform and Oversight

“Confronting Recidivism: Prisoner Re-entry Programs and a Just Future for
All Americans”

Testimony by
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I want to start by thanking Chairman Davis and the Committee for taking the time to examine this important issue and for providing Public/Private Ventures with the opportunity to testify today. I also want to thank Congressmen Portman and Davis for their work on legislation in support of the returning offender population.

I am Fred Davie, Senior Vice President of Public Policy at P/PV, a national nonprofit organization that seeks to improve the effectiveness of social policies and programs, with particular emphasis on workforce development issues. P/PV designs, tests, and studies initiatives that increase support, skills and opportunities for residents of low-income communities with an eye toward informing the development of public policy.

Every year, approximately 760,000 prison inmates and juvenile detainees are released from secure detention facilities and returned to their communities and families. Disconnected from the labor market and from social networks and at high risk of re-engaging in criminal behaviors, the return of these ex-prisoners threatens the already tenuous cohesion of many of the most troubled communities in the country.

In response to the crisis of crime and recidivism, in 2003 P/PV developed and launched a \$32.5 million national faith-based and community reentry initiative—***Ready4Work: An Ex-Prisoner, Faith and Community Initiative***—in partnership with the U.S. Departments of Labor and Justice and the Annie E. Casey and Ford Foundations. *Ready4Work* operates in areas of high crime to strengthen local support networks for young adults and juveniles as they reenter their communities following detention and/or incarceration. The primary mission of *Ready4Work* is to connect ex-offenders with employment opportunities and help participants find the non-work-related supports (housing, transportation, childcare) that they need to sustain employment. Each participant is also matched to a volunteer mentor recruited through local faith-based and community organizations to provide personal support and assistance.

The 16 sites in this initiative can be found across the country and are both secular and faith-based. We operate adult sites in Oakland, Detroit, Washington, DC, New York

City, Milwaukee, Jacksonville, FL, Chicago, Philadelphia, Los Angeles and Houston. The juvenile sites are located in Seattle, Brooklyn, Los Angeles, Boston and Camden, NJ. I have included a full list of the participating institutions for the record, and P/PV would be happy to facilitate contact between the Committee and our participating organizations if follow-up is necessary or desired.

Ready4Work is currently in its second year of operation. The sites have thus far recruited over 2,000 participants—all nonviolent, non-sexual (except prostitution) felony offenders. Eighty-five percent of *Ready4Work* participants are male and nearly 80 percent are African Americans. Almost all participants return to the same few zip codes in each of the participating cities. Of the active adult participants, nearly 100 percent are receiving case management services; 64 percent of participants entering year two of the program have been placed in jobs; nearly half of eligible participants have been matched with mentors.

In the juvenile sites, the demographics are as follows: 64 percent of the young people served are African Americans; 84 percent are male. Half are between the ages of 17 and 19, with 38 percent under the age of 17, and 12 percent ages 20 or older. Of the active participants, almost 100 percent are receiving case management services; 79 percent are being mentored, 60% are receiving educational services and 67 percent are receiving employment services.

What sets *Ready4Work* apart from traditional reentry efforts is its focus on placing faith-based and community organizations at the heart of the reentry network. Based on our previous efforts with high-risk youth, we believe these organizations are a unique source of accountability and support for returning offenders. They are frequently located in the most deeply affected neighborhoods and have leadership, volunteer, social and spiritual resources that can make the difference between success and failure for a returnee. Frankly, the compassion and commitment these groups can and do bring to the work of reentry is irreplaceable.

We have been very pleased to see and hear the conversations in Washington, D.C. and across the country around the issue of prisoner reentry. We applaud the Committee, Congressmen Portman and Davis, Senators Brownback and Biden, and others who have moved this issue to the top of Congress' agenda. P/PV believes that the Second Chance Act provides a solid basis for creating a national policy aimed at reducing crime and recidivism.

We also believe, however that the bill should be strengthened to find ways of directing more assistance toward the faith- and community-based groups that are the front-line institutions in this effort. Further, we believe that Congress should look for ways to match the program experience and technical-assistance capacity of larger, intermediary organizations with the “people power” these small faith-based and community groups offer. This has been the *Ready4Work* model—one that we believe offers the best chance

to break the cycle of crime and imprisonment for the benefit of returning offenders and their communities.

Thank you again, Chairman Davis, for taking P/PV's efforts into consideration. We look forward to continuing to work with the 109th Congress to enact meaningful reentry legislation.

Adult Ready4Work Sites:

- Allen Temple Baptist Church, Oakland, CA
- America Works with Hartford Memorial Baptist Church, Detroit, MI
- East of the River Clergy Police Community Partnership, Washington, DC
- Exodus Transitional Community, East Harlem, NY
- Holy Cathedral/Word of Hope Ministries, Milwaukee, WI
- Operation New Hope, Jacksonville, FL
- SAFER Foundation, Chicago, IL
- Search for Common Ground/Philadelphia Consensus Group, Philadelphia, PA
- The City of Memphis/Second Chance Program, Memphis, TN
- Union Rescue Mission, Los Angeles, CA
- Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church/Moving Forward InnerChange Freedom Initiative, Houston, TX

Juvenile Ready4Work Sites:

- Council of Churches of Greater Seattle, Seattle, WA
- Girls Re-entry Assistance and Support Program/The Office of the Kings Country District Attorney, Brooklyn, NY
- Los Angeles Ten Point Coalition/West Angeles Church of God In Christ, Los Angeles, CA
- Straight Ahead Ministries, Boston, MA
- Volunteers of America, Camden, NJ